

## INTRODUCTION

Diaries are the “candid cameras” of their day catching and preserving a mien of history that enralls us most. This Lucy Buck has done with literary skill and rare perception in her daily record of the martial sixties in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia - its military, political and economic aspects as well as the domestic and social. With two brothers and many cousins in the Confederate Army, the 19-year-old lass was fiercely patriotic and although Yankees by the thousands marched and fought over, occupied and vandalised the Valley, they never conquered the irrepressible Lucy. “The tyrant’s heel may be upon us,” she wrote, “but although he may restrain speech and action, he cannot shackle the thoughts and feelings that glow within us and which, like all suppressed flames, will burn all the more fiercely when they blaze into action.” As these pages, sparkling with fire and brimstone, are a fascinating revelation of the “thoughts and feelings that glowed within” a Christian patriot, the prevailing mood is indeed as sad as the earthly tribulations of a family, town and country caught up in the “angry billows of political and military strife”, but it is also as “sweet as the blessed hope of heaven” that sustained the devout diarist through her “fiery trials.” Her spirits rise and fall with the fortunes of the Confederacy, running the gamut from “frantic delight” over the recapture of the town from the Yankees, to the flowing tears into which she melted at church when the floodgates of emotion, pent up during weeks of depressing news and enemy occupation, were opened by the “soul-stirring old hymn, ‘How Firm A Foundation’,” which had been her “favorite lullaby and the strain in which the family had united their voices on Sunday evenings at Bel Air.” But gleeful or gloomy, she is ever voluble, whether describing a “very exciting, very exhilarating” battle “with bullets and shells passing near enough to whisper confidential messages;” the encircling campfires of “our fiendish foes couched in their lairs, ready to spring upon us;” merry gatherings around tea table, piano, or fireside with soldiers camped nearby or home on leave, hungry for food, flirtation and family; Christmas and holidays celebrated as joyfully as the heartaches and privations of war allowed; days of fasting and prayer with “solemn impressive sermons” that moved her to “foreswear dancing for the rest of the war;” the “glorious day” when “the Grand Old Chief”, General Lee, stopped at Bel Air to rest and drink buttermilk while the girls played and sang for him. There are graphic pen-portraits of the prominent people who “preempted” or were entertained at Bel Air, including Generals Lee, Longstreet, Shields and Kimball.

As a rail and crossroads town, Front Royal was often a hive of military operations and excitement, lying in the path of armies advancing “with bands playing and flags flying,” and in the wake of the wounded and weary backwash of such tragic encounters as Antietam and Gettysburg. Bel Air, home of the influential Buck Family for over a century, was a center of local affairs from the time it was built about 1795 by Capt. Thomas Buck, a Founding-Father of Front Royal and commander of “Buck’s Minute Men” in the Revolutionary militia. As the mansion

house of a productive farm of 100 acres, a mill, and orchard in the 1860's it often was occupied as headquarters for military staffs and a campground for armies, Blue and Gray. Lucy's diary resounds with the marching feet and rollings wheels of "mighty multitudes" filing past Bel Air, their "martial music and soul-burning shouts mingled in one unbroken, thrilling volume of sound." Continuous streams of "straved, dusty fellows called at the house for milk, bread and water." When Front Royal was held as headquarters of the Federal Department of the Rappahannoch, the whole area was "white with the tents and wagons of McDowell, Shields and Banks." The volatile Lucy echoes the rage and dismay of the citizens, helpless before the swarming masses "ravenous for food and fuel, tramping over the waving wheat and blooming clover." But her bitter-best vocabulary was reserved for the raiding hordes of Milroy, Sigel, Hunter and Sheridan, who came to search, plunder, steal and burn - "barbaric campaigns of torch and torture. Cowardly crews on pitiful business," she scoffed, "brutally investigating ladies' wardrobes and bureaus. We had to keep up a perfect system of picketing the porches, lest they steal everything." And again: "I hear a strange footfall ... and spring up to leave the room as I always did when the Yankees came ... a huge anathema hangs pendant on my lips and a big wave of indignation rolls over me."

Lucy Buck was born at Front Royal, Va., Sept. 25, 1842, the daughter of William Mason Buck and Elizabeth Ashby Buck. She was reared at Bel Air in the finest religious and cultural heritage of "the old South". As the eldest daughter among thirteen children, she assumed loving responsibility for many family and household duties that sorely taxed her young prowess and patience after all the servants ran off with the Yankees. To a revered and trusted Christ she committed her burdens of anxiety for the adored absent brothers, for her aging father bowed under the weight of economic ruin, for the future of the impoverished land. Charming, vivacious and popular, she had many beaux but never married. Continuing her diary, she was a long-remembered and beloved figure as she sat with a pad on her knee, in the midst of a chattering group of young relatives or in the quiet of her room, exerting herself to write despite pain and fatigue until her death in 1918. She was equally articulate in prose and poetry, winning first prize for her poem, "The Sunset," in a national newspaper contest. Her diary, abiding proof of her narrative skill, won the coveted Marian Perdue Cup awarded by the United Daughters of the Confederacy for "the most outstanding contribution to Southern history."

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